

OUTGOING MESSAGE

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PAGE 001
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UNINTEL

SUBJECT: LATIN AMERICA BRIEF OCPAS [REDACTED] OR 30 JANUARY 1980.
FROM: ODI/O/CPAS.

ITEM

1. EL SALVADOR-US: VISIT OF PRESIDENT CRISTIANI (C NF)

1. EL SALVADOR-US: VISIT OF PRESIDENT CRISTIANI [REDACTED]
PRESIDENT CRISTIANI WILL HAVE PEACE AND ECONOMIC ISSUES ON HIS
AGENDA WHEN HE MEETS WITH THE UN SECRETARY GENERAL AND US OFFICIALS
THIS WEEK. [REDACTED]

CITING THE AGREEMENT BY THE CENTRAL AMERICAN PRESIDENTS TO CALL
FOR UN MEDIATION IN THE SALVADORAN CONFLICT, CRISTIANI WILL ASK
SECRETARY GENERAL PEREZ DE CUELLAR FOR HELP IN RESTARTING
NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE FMLN REBELS. [REDACTED] HOWEVER,
THAT THE SALVADORAN GOVERNMENT MAY WANT THE UN ROLE RESTRICTED TO
OBSERVER STATUS ONCE TALKS BEGIN. CRISTIANI [REDACTED] ALSO WANTS
PEREZ DE CUELLAR TO ASK LATIN AMERICAN LEADERS TO PRESS THE FMLN TO
LAY DOWN ITS ARMS AND JOIN THE LEGITIMATE POLITICAL PROCESS IN EL
SALVADOR. [REDACTED]

THE VISIT COMES AT A TIME WHEN EL SALVADOR'S PROJECTED GAINS

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FROM ITS ECONOMIC REFORMS APPEAR IN DOUBT. DIRECT AND INDIRECT ECONOMIC DAMAGE CAUSED BY THE FMLN OFFENSIVE LAST NOVEMBER IS ESTIMATED AT \$63 MILLION. SALVADORAN OFFICIALS PREDICT THAT SEVERE DAMAGE TO ELECTRICAL AND TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS, FACTORIES, AND BRIDGES AND PRODUCTION SLOWDOWNS WILL REDUCE GROWTH--PREVIOUSLY ESTIMATED AT 1.4 PERCENT FOR 1989--BY HALF.

COMMENT: CRISTIANI, WHO CAMPAIGNED ON A PROMISE TO SEEK PEACE, PROBABLY HOPES UN INVOLVEMENT WILL REVIVE THE DIALOGUE PROCESS. BOTH THE INSURGENTS, WHO HAVE ALREADY MET WITH UN OFFICIALS, AND SAN SALVADOR APPEAR TO HAVE HARDENED THEIR NEGOTIATING POSITIONS SINCE THE NOVEMBER FIGHTING, BUT CRISTIANI ALMOST CERTAINLY IS EAGER TO RESUME TALKS TO UNDERCUT CHARGES BY THE FMLN AND OTHERS THAT HE IS NOT SERIOUS ABOUT PEACE.

CRISTIANI'S KEY AIM IN WASHINGTON IS TO PERSUADE US OFFICIALS NOT TO CUT AID TO EL SALVADOR. HE UNDOUBTEDLY WILL POINT TO THE ARREST AND PENDING TRIAL OF EIGHT SOLDIERS, INCLUDING A COLONEL, AS EVIDENCE THAT HIS GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO RESOLVING THE MURDERS OF THE JESUIT PRIESTS AND PUNISHING HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES GENERALLY. TO REFUTE FMLN CLAIMS THAT SAN SALVADOR IS USING THE REBEL OFFENSIVE TO PRESS FOR MORE AUTHORITARIAN METHODS, CRISTIANI MIGHT CITE HIS VETO LAST MONTH OF ANTITERRORISM LEGISLATION THAT WOULD HAVE RESTRICTED PRESS AND SPEECH FREEDOMS. THE GLOOMY ECONOMIC OUTLOOK MAY POSTPONE SOME OF CRISTIANI'S MARKET-ORIENTED REFORMS, INVESTMENT PROJECTS, AND SOCIAL SPENDING, BUT HE PROBABLY BELIEVES THE TIME IS NOT RIGHT TO ASK THE US FOR MORE AID.

EL SALVADOR: CRISTIANI'S BATTLE FOR CREDIBILITY

PRESIDENT CRISTIANI IS TRYING TO RESTORE US CONFIDENCE IN HIS LEADERSHIP AND COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRATIC REFORM. HE FAILED TO PREVENT RIGHTWING VIOLENCE DURING LAST NOVEMBER'S GUERRILLA OFFENSIVE, AND HE IS STILL TRYING TO DISPEL THE NOTION THAT ULTRARIGHTISTS IN HIS PARTY AND IN THE MILITARY ARE RUNNING THE GOVERNMENT.

THE GOVERNMENT'S SWIFT INVESTIGATION OF THE MURDERS OF THE JESUITS AND THE CONTINUED PURSUIT OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE FMLN HAVE AIDED CRISTIANI IN RESTORING THE MODERATE REPUTATION HE ENJOYED EARLIER IN HIS TERM. IMPLEMENTATION OF HIS RUMORED PLANS TO REMOVE INEFFECTIVE OR HARDLINE MEMBERS OF THE CABINET AND AMONG THE SENIOR RANKS OF THE MILITARY WOULD FURTHER DEMONSTRATE CRISTIANI'S AUTHORITY. THE APPOINTMENT OF LOYALISTS WOULD BEEF UP HIS POWER BASE.

CRISTIANI SO FAR HAS RELIEVED ONLY ONE CABINET MINISTER--VICE PRESIDENT MERINO HAS LOST THE INTERIOR MINISTRY--AND APPEARS TO HAVE PUT OFF KEY CHANGES IN THE MILITARY HIGH COMMAND. THIS CAUTION IS CONSISTENT WITH CRISTIANI'S CHARACTERISTICALLY CONCILIATORY APPROACH; HE WANTS TO AVOID PUSHING THE HARDLINERS TOO FAR IN HIS EFFORTS TO ACHIEVE POLITICAL PEACE AT HOME. HE MAY ALSO WANT TO AVOID IRRITATING THE MILITARY UNTIL THE OUTCOME OF THE JESUIT CASE APPEARS MORE SETTLED. THE PRICE HE PAYS, HOWEVER, MAY BE PERPETUATING HIS IMAGE AS A WEAK LEADER AT HOME AND ABROAD.